



United States Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

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Colleagues and friends:

Last November the Assad regime blacked out almost all Internet and cell phone service in Syria. For a few long days Syrians were unable to obtain or share information in the usual ways. But thanks to equipment and training that [CSO](#) had provided over the preceding months, countless independent journalists and activists stayed connected, and two independent news outlets continued to broadcast inside the country.

Syrians' ability to share information is vital to their safety and to their efforts to bring regime change. A recent poll found that two of our independent media partners are the most-watched and most-trusted opposition news outlets in Syria. Both broadcast the opposition's messages promoting change, unity, and safety. Social media is another part of our communications initiative, and an opposition Facebook page saw a more than twenty-fold increase in interactions in less than a month due to social media engagement strategy improvements.

Sophisticated communications plans, whether high-tech or low-tech, have tremendous potential to prevent or limit conflict. Moreover, we have found that if we identify local initiatives and then amplify them, they become more powerful. Local people know the audience and which messages are authentic.



TechCamps help bring together members of the technology sector and civil society leaders. In this "speed-geeking" session, one of the TechCamp Honduras trainers demonstrates mobile based technology to another attendee.

In Honduras, which is struggling to reduce the world's highest non-war-zone murder rate, CSO partnered with the [State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs](#) to learn how Hondurans communicate. This survey research was then used by our local partners, particularly the Alliance for Peace and Justice (*Alianza por la Paz y Justicia*), to launch a campaign urging citizens to take collective action against crime and to put pressure on the government to purge corrupt officials.

The Alliance's campaign has been cited as a major driver of institutional reform. The Alliance continues to be instrumental in these changes by holding press conferences and appearing on radio and TV talk shows. This partner is using both high-tech communication,

such as YouTube videos and Facebook ads, and low-tech communication, such as posters and hand bills, which our research showed are important in reaching all levels of Honduran society.

One way to generate creative communications solutions to conflict is to bring together civil society leaders and technologists in what is called a "[Tech Camp](#)." We worked with *Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa* to organize a session in Honduras that attracted more than 100 enthusiastic participants who identified challenges in citizen security and brainstormed. The results included an SMS-based platform to map homicides and track the progress of the investigations. Another promising product was a technological tool that would make it easier for frightened witnesses and victims to provide crime tips without fear of becoming targets.

In Kenya, the strategically vital anchor of East Africa, our goal was to prevent a rerun of the violence that erupted after the 2007 election, which resulted in the loss of more than 1,130 lives and the displacement of 660,000 Kenyans. To reduce violence during the March 2013 election, CSO and others helped a Kenyan organization build a cell phone-based early-warning system. As campaigning intensified, we funded centers staffed with Kenyan volunteers to take calls from fellow citizens about signs of trouble, and then trained them to validate the reports and alert police or local leaders.

Working with the [U.S. Embassy](#), [USAID](#), and bilateral partners, CSO set up an around-the-clock elections "command center." It featured an array of video displays that provided a wide range of information from across Kenya based on social-media analysis, crowd-sourced reports, live TV news, and GIS mapping. The result was an unprecedented rapid-response capability during the tense final days. In the months leading up to the balloting, we helped strengthen ties between citizens and police so that reaction to tips would improve. Thanks to the determination of the Kenyan people-and the support of their partners-the death toll this time declined dramatically, to about 20.

Advanced technological tools are also improving our anticipation and analysis of conflicts, whatever the locale. With a range of U.S. government partners, CSO is employing big-data and analytical tools. One is [DARPA's Integrated Crisis Early Warning System](#), which aggregates more than 20 million news stories to help us identify trends in conflict at local, national, and regional levels. Another is Senturion, a dynamic scenario simulation model that we used to guide analysis of areas in Nigeria's Delta Region most prone to violence and who is most likely to perpetrate it. As CNN put it, "The State Department is using cutting-edge data gathering technology to help keep the peace in some areas and keep violence from flaring in others, saving both physical and fiscal costs of conflict."

We are dedicated to bringing [innovative approaches to conflict-prevention and response](#) throughout the State Department. We welcome your ideas on how we can help nations beleaguered by conflict. You can write us at CSOpublic@state.gov. We also encourage you to forward our news to people you think would like to join this conversation. Previous dispatches are located in our "[Other Releases](#)" section of our website. You can also find us at [@StateCSO](#) or www.facebook.com/StateCSO.

Best,

Ambassador Rick Barton
Assistant Secretary for Conflict and Stabilization Operations

P.S.: To find out how Belize is gaining hope in its efforts to reduce high gang-related crime rates, take a look at a [DipNote](#) by two of our colleagues.

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